

# Developing Student's Communication Skills through the Use of Communication Strategies and Writing: Part 2

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The materials reported in this paper are part of an MA dissertation in TESOL submitted to the University of Foreign Studies in Nagoya Japan. This study that was conducted over a period of two years attempts to examine the relationship between the use of conversation strategies (CS) and lengths of pauses students make in conversation, as well as the connection between writing paragraphs on conversation topics and oral output. Furthermore, it explores how structured support for students' speaking development affects students' motivation to study English. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through recordings of students' conversations, transcriptions of recorded conversations, CS data sheets to record the use of CS, videotaping of focus groups, questionnaires and focus group student interviews. As the space in this journal does not allow for the entire dissertation of 168 pages, including action research reports, worksheets, transcriptions and appendixes, the present report is focused on describing details on how this study was conducted, as well as to provide a detailed explanation of how data was collected and analyzed.

## Method

This research was conducted from April 2017 to November 2017. The objective of this study was to examine the following research questions: (1) How does the use of conversation strategies relate to the frequency and length of pauses students make in conversation? (2) How is students' oral output affected when they discuss topics on which they have written paragraphs? (3) How is students' motivation affected when they have structured support for their speaking development? To answer these research questions, I have gathered both quantitative and qualitative data. The methods used to collect this data were: (1) recording of timed conversations and transcriptions (2) CS Data-Sheet One (3) videotaping of focus student group (4) CS data-sheet two (5) questionnaires, and an (6) interview of focus student group. This chapter will provide a detailed description of the teaching and researching context as well as instruments used in this research. The chapter is divided into three parts: teaching context and participants, research design instruments, method of data collection and data analysis.

### Teaching Context and Participants

In order to investigate my research questions, I conducted this study at a women's university in Nagoya between April 2017 to November 2017. The students of my research class were majors in ecology and are required to study English in their first year only. Generally, the English level of the students in this department is low, and that was especially true for this research class. The number of students was 14 in the first semester, but two students dropped out. One of those was a student from the focus group. Since this is a women's university, all students in this class were female. This group of students did not appear to be motivated to learn English and some students were absent several times. Initially I chose four students, who volunteered to help out, but after one stopped coming to class there were three left.

Before the semester ended Nene allowed me to use her data, but she was not part of the focus group students' interview.

When I refer to them, I will use their pseudonyms Miki, Yuki, Naoko and Nene.

Miki is a student who is interested in learning English, and considering these students' low ability, the one who has the highest level among those three. Yuki is a student who is fairly motivated and seems to enjoy learning English, but her ability is very low. Naoko is not motivated and claims that her level is very low, which seems to be true. To me it seemed that, if she would have tried harder, she could have done better. Miki never missed a class, while the other two missed several classes. Nene is not a student of the focus group but provided a recording of her timed- conversation done in both July and November for analysis.

The textbook used in this class is called '*Nice Talking with You I*' by Tom Kenny and Linda Woo (2011). This textbook focuses on conversation and introduces CS with the goal of carrying timed-conversations on different topics. (see page 109) Although this was the first and most basic part of a series, the students were unable to do most of the activities in the text. This book introduces many CS, so I tried to choose the ones I thought my students could benefit most from. As for the timed conversations, I tried to modify the questions to make it easier for the students to have an extended conversation. Using the text as a guide, I created handouts that were based on relevant text topics in order to scaffold my teaching better.

### Research Design and Instruments

This study was conducted to investigate the aforementioned research questions. It investigated whether the use of CS relate to the frequency and length of pauses students make in conversation. It also aimed to explore the relationship between writing short paragraphs on conversation topics and oral output afterward. Lastly, I wanted to understand whether students' motivation is affected when they are given structured support for their speaking development. I used a mixed methods approach (MMA) because both qualitative and quantitative data can support each other. Dörnyei (2009) describes quantitative methods as tools "to explore questions in an 'objective' manner" (p. 31) and qualitative methods as tools "to explore the participants' views of the situation being studied" (2007, p. 38), and together they can give a richer understanding of a research context. As cited by Dörnyei (2007), Miles and Huberman (1994) state "Narratives and variable-driven analyses need to interpenetrate and inform each other. Realists,

idealists, and critical theorists can do better by incorporating other ideas than by remaining pure.” Strauss and Corbin (1998) elaborate by adding “Both qualitative and quantitative forms of research both play roles in theorizing. The issue is not whether to use one form or the other, but how both might work together to understand theory better” (p. 34). Advantages of using MMR are that understandings gained from one dimension of the study can be expanded or explained the in the other; one can confirm, and triangulate answers developed in one dimension or phase of the study in the other. Furthermore, one can generalize and develop in-depth understanding (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). I believe when dealing with students it is especially helpful to use MMR because it can provide more conclusive aswers. Quantitative data can answer what happened, and qualitative data can give a deeper understanding as for the “why” (see Figure 1) for the breakdown of my research design. I will next discuss the collection during each phase.

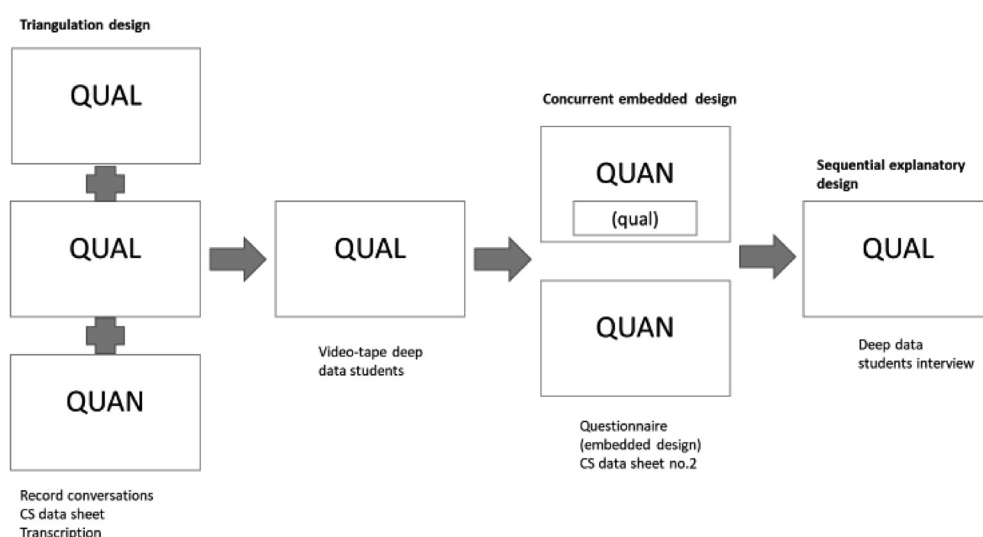


Figure 1 Research design 2nd Semester

In the first phase (see Figure 1), students recorded their conversations, transcribed them and filled out a CS Data Sheet to show which CS were used and in what frequency. Later in phase two, I video recorded the timed-conversations of the deep data students. In the third phase, I gave a questionnaire to gather quantitative data with a few open questions for qualitative data. The students also filled out another CS data sheet to see the sequence of CS acquisition throughout the semester. Finally, based on the result of the questionnaires, I interviewed the focus student group.

### Methods of Data Collection

To collect both quantitative data and qualitative data, I used seven methods, namely (1) recordings of conversations by students, (2) transcriptions, (3) CS data sheet one, (4) videotaping of the focus student group, (5) questionnaires, (6) CS data sheet two, and (7) focus student group interviews. (see Figure 2).

Date	Instrument
November 13 <sup>th</sup>	Recording of timed-conversations and transcriptions
November 13 <sup>th</sup>	CS Data Sheet One
November 20 <sup>th</sup>	Video recording of focus student group
November 27 <sup>th</sup>	Questionnaire
November 27 <sup>th</sup>	CS Data Sheet Two
December 4 <sup>th</sup>	Interview of focus student group

Figure 2 Schedule for data collection

**Recording of Timed-Conversations and transcriptions.** Freeman and Freeman (1998) discuss the value of recording material as it is worked on in lessons to encourage learning of oral communication and reading proficiency. Prior to the recording of the timed-conversations, my students wrote about each conversation question and practiced discussing them in pair conversations. In their conversations, I encouraged the students to use CSs. As a teaching tool, after recording the conversations, the students were asked to listen to their conversations to see if or how CS were used and to try to find possible errors in their conversations. For data collection, the recordings were used to gain knowledge of the lengths and frequency of pauses made during the conversations and whether CS had an effect on pausing. The recordings were also used provide data on the CS used and this information was inputted into a CS check sheet, which I discuss in the next section. The transcriptions were based on the recordings of the students timed-conversations. After the students filled out the CS check sheet, each student transcribed their conversation with their partner individually. After completing the transcriptions, the students listened to the recordings again to identify pauses made during the conversation and the lengths of them. Students would mark these on their transcription sheet in order for them to realize where and how often they paused. This was important because the students would answer questions related to the pauses and the frequency of them in the questionnaire. Students submitted their detailed transcriptions to me.

**CS Data Sheet One.** After the recordings of the conversations, students filled out a CS check sheet to their CS usage (see Table 2). This was designed to collect data on the CS used and the frequency of it.

Table 2.

CS data sheet one

Which CSs did you use in your conversation? Put a check in a box beside each one you use.

Open a conversation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
End a conversation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asking the same question	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What about you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How about you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Video Recording of focus group students.** To gather actual examples of conversations done by students, I video recorded the conversations of the deep data students. Burns (2010) states, that even

though audio-recording is easier than video-recording, audio recording is great to record what was said, but it does not allow you to observe gestures, facial expressions, body movements and other things like the look and the feel of the classroom. All these elements are helpful when focusing on the use of CSs in relation to the pauses students make. Furthermore, when transcribing a video-taped conversation, facial expressions and gestures can help to understand what actually happened much better in a particular conversation.

**CS Data Sheet Two.** This is a continuation from the first semester. During the first semester, I recorded the “study of CSs” between April and July. The students marked each strategy in terms of whether they knew or did not know it at a certain stage, and whether they could actively use it. This semester I compared September and November. It shows at what point students became familiar with certain CSs, and when they started to use them in their conversations. Nakatani and Goh (2013) note, that “although examining the increase of specific CS use is important, we need concrete evidence to reveal the direct relationship between strategy instruction and L2 development.” The data from this sheet was used to understand how well the CS were known and which ones were still difficult to use for the students. This is not only an important information before the test, but also what CS need to be focused on in future lessons.

**Questionnaires.** I conducted a survey to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. “Survey studies aim at describing the characteristics of a population by examining a sample of that group” (Dörnyei, 2007). One other advantage of doing a questionnaire is that one can gather data from many respondents at the same time (Cohen, 2007). Because scientific research is trying to find answers to questions in a systematic and disciplined way, questionnaires have become the most popular research instrument in applied in social sciences (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 101). The questionnaire I administered contained a majority of closed-ended questions for quantitative analyses and some open-ended questions for qualitative analyses. The closed-ended questions were on a 5-point Likert scale. To make sure that students could state their opinions freely, students could choose to answer the open-ended questions in Japanese. Before the students started to answer the questionnaire, I explained each item on the questionnaire. When students did not understand something, I tried to translate those questions into Japanese or let students who understood explain it to those who needed help.

The first section of the questionnaire dealt with speaking and CS with six Likert-scale items, and one open-ended question. The second section had three questions about writing and how it influenced their oral output and again, the last question was open-ended. The open-ended question was related to my research question about the impact of writing on speech. The next section investigated motivation had two closed-ended questions. The final part consisted of open-ended questions with two of them directly related to my research questions on whether the writing activities supported students with speaking and whether the use of CS had an influence of the frequency and lengths of pauses students made in their conversations. Based on the results of the questionnaire, I developed questions for the interview with my deep data students the following week.

**Interview of focus group Students.** After selecting my deep data students, I asked them to complete a consent form. For the interviews with the deep data students, I considered the following questions:

- a) When would be the best time for it? I wanted to do the interviews after administrating the questionnaires to especially address my research questions in them. I also had to make sure that the students were ready that day, so I told them two weeks in advance.
- b) Where could be an appropriate place for it? After thinking about it, I decided to do it at one end of the classroom while the other students worked on a task. That worked out well because the classroom is fairly big, and we were not bothered, nor did we bother the other students
- c) How long should it be? I tried to time the interview for a half an hour or little less and felt that was about right.
- d) Under what conditions? I made sure that the students were okay with the interview (see page 110 for semi-structured interview questions).

Burns (2010) points out that during interviews “it is important to watch out for how you listen, how you ask questions and how you go about asking your interviewee to clarify or expand what he or she says” (Burns, 2010). My interviews were semi-structured, and my main focus was to expand on the questionnaire and focus on my research questions. I looked at the questionnaire, and based the answers received, I prepared several questions for each section. Dörnyei (2007) explains a semi-structured interview as follows: “Although there is a set of pre-prepared guiding questions and prompts, the format is open-ended, and the interviewee is encouraged to elaborate on the issues raised in an exploratory manner” (p. 136). I needed to provide guidance and direction using my prepared questions but let the interviewee lead the discussion.

## Data Analyses

The data from the recordings and transcriptions, the CS data sheets, the video-taping of the focus student group and the questionnaire were analyzed to understand whether 1) the use of CS affects the lengths and frequency of pauses in student’s conversations 2) students oral output is affected when they discuss topics they have written paragraphs on and 3) how students motivation is affected when they have structured support for their speaking development.

**Recording of Timed-Conversations and transcriptions.** After the students transcribed their November conversations, they listened to the recording of their conversations again and marked the frequency and lengths of pauses in their conversations. I analyzed those conversations in terms of where pauses were made in relation to CSs use.

Additionally, I collected recordings of conversations of four students done in July. I then transcribed one of the conversations, the one from July and the one from November, calculated the lengths and frequency of pauses made per minute and tabulated and compared the data of both conversations. I also counted all the CSs used in their conversations and calculated the number of CSs used per minute, which I presented in a table.

**CS Data Sheet One.** After the students recorded their conversations, I handed a CSs data sheet to each student. The students listened to their conversations and checked the CSs used during the conversation and the frequency of it (see Table 2). Afterward, I summarized all the CSs used in terms of how many students

used certain CSs, and how often each CSs was used in total. This data was displayed in a table.

**Video recording of focus student group.** In addition, to the recordings, I video recorded the conversations of the focus group students. I calculated both, the length and frequency of pauses made per minute, in the conversations done in July and November. These were tabulated. For each student in the focus group, I recorded the CSs used in their conversations and the number of CSs used per minute. Moreover, these videos recorded recordings of the focus student group are used to demonstrate how students progressed in speaking compared to July.

**CS Data Sheet Two.** This way of collecting data was already carried out in the first semester in order to record the time from where CSs were first introduced to the point students were able to use them. On the sheet that students had to fill out were three choices: the first was 'didn't know' the second 'know but cannot use' and the third 'able to use'. On the data sheet the students addressed all CSs and marked one of those choices. After receiving every student's paper, I tabulated the data accordingly of when students acquired CS from April to November 2017 and displayed it in a table.

**Questionnaires.** For the questionnaire, I chose a concurrent embedded design in order to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. I analyzed the quantitative data by tabulating and graphing the results. The qualitative "open-ended" questions were used to integrate it with the results of the deep data interview since it was an explanatory design. First, quantitative data was gathered and analyzed, and the qualitative data was used to explain the quantitative findings. The most relevant items to my research questions were displayed in a graph, and the others were tabulated and compared to the results in July. For the open-ended questions, I choose the most relevant answers to my study and used the original quotes (in Japanese) together with an English translation to support and explain the quantitative findings.

**Focus student group interview.** Although the interviews were conducted in English, some answers were given in Japanese. The interviews were conducted after the questionnaire to explain the answers of the questionnaires better. Most questions were related to the research questions and focused mainly on CSs, writings and motivation. I selected relevant quotes to integrate both the quantitative findings and open-ended questions of the questionnaire.

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